Yours Andrews
1799. From the Author

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Mr. Howard's SERMON

AT THE

Ordination *of Mr. Woodbridge.*

BRITISH MUSEUM

A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE

ORDINATION

OF THE

Rev. BENJ. R. WOODBRIDGE,

TO THE

PASTORAL OFFICE,

OVER THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY IN NORWICH,
OCTOBER 17th, 1799:

By BEZALEEL HOWARD, A. M.

PASTOR of the FIRST CHURCH in *Springfield.*

SPRINGFIELD:

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M,DCCC.

AN

ORDINATION SERMON.

EZEKIEL III. 17.

Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the houſe of Iſrael: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.

EVER ſince GOD has had a church in the world, there has been an order of men, whoſe particular buſineſs it was to miniſter in holy things. Under the law, the Prieſts and Levites were by divine appointment ſeparated from their brethren and ſet apart to this important work. Soon after our Saviour aſſumed his public character, he ordained ſeventy, and ſent them forth to publiſh the glad tidings of ſalvation to a ſinful world. And when the inſpired Apoſtles ordained Paſtors and Teachers in the primitive churches of CHRIST, they gave them directions to commit that miniſtry, which they had received, unto faithful men; ſo that the church might be ſupplied with a regular ſucceſſion of Paſtors and Teachers until the ſecond coming of the LORD.

ALMOST eighteen hundred years have now elapſed ſince the eſtabliſhment of the chriſtian miniſtry. And it is very pleaſing to look back and ſee how wonderfully this order of men has been preſerved. Amidſt all the changes and revolutions which have taken place in the kingdoms and nations of the earth, there has been in every generation, an order of men ſeparated and ſet apart to preach the goſpel. And the ſame goſpel is now preached which was publiſhed by CHRIST and his Apoſtles. And the ſame ordinances which were inſtituted by JESUS CHRIST, viz. Baptiſm and the Lord's Supper, are ſtill adminiſtered in all his churches: And have been uniformly adminiſtered through the long period of almoſt eighteen hundred years. Is not this a pleaſing demonſtration of the heavenly origin of our holy religion? Nothing human of this nature continues ſo long as eighteen hundred years, nor half ſo long. Where are the admired ſyſtems of LYCURGUS and SOLON thoſe ancient Grecian ſages?

Where is the wonderful code of JUSTINIAN the great Roman law giver? Where are the famous governments eſtabliſhed by ALEXANDER and JULIUS CÆSAR, in all the pomp and fulneſs of human power? Where are all thoſe governments, and ſyſtems of laws and orders of men appointed to adminiſter them? where are they? Why, they were all of human origin, and like their authors are long ſince gone down to the grave and ſleep in ſilence. And why has not chriſtianity followed them down to the grave? Becauſe its author did not continue there; if he had it would. But he aroſe from the dead and triumphed over the grave. And when he was about to aſcend on high, he ſaid to his miniſters, *Go ye and teach all nations, and lo I am with you alway even unto the end of the world.* This is the reaſon and the only reaſon why this order of men have been diſtinguiſhed from any other that ever exiſted on earth. Their office is of divine appointment, and he who holds the ſtars in his right hand has promiſed to be with them and preſerve them even to the end of time.

As the chriſtian miniſtry is an office of divine appointment, has already been eſtabliſhed nearly eighteen centuries and is ſtill to be continued to the end of the world: it is hence very certain that the duties of this office are of a ſerious and important nature; and that thoſe who have entered into it ought often to examine themſelves as to their diligence and fidelity in the diſcharge of them: and that thoſe who are about to enter into this ſacred office ought to do it with great ſerioufneſs of mind—careful ſelf-examination as to the habitual ſtate and exerciſes of their own hearts, and fervent humble ſupplication to GOD for the aids of his ſpirit to aſſiſt them in the right and profitable diſcharge of the work.

THE words of our text, and the occaſion on which we are now aſſembled together, will naturally lead me to point out the character, and deſcribe ſome of the duties of the chriſtian miniſter. Theſe are often illuſtrated in the word of GOD by metaphors taken from the common offices and employments of the preſent life.—Sometimes he is called a *Teacher* to teach and inſtruct the diſciples of CHRIST—ſometimes he is called a *Steward* to feed and nouriſh them—again he is called a *Miniſter* to aſſiſt and ſerve them, and in our text he is called a *Watchman* to watch over them and guard them from error and deluſion. Son of man I have made thee a watchman unto the houſe of Iſrael.

A WATCHMAN or centinel in cities and armies, is placed for a guard and ſecurity to the inhabitants.

THE lives and property of their brethren are committed to

their care, and hence a breach of truſt in that office, I believe has ever been conſidered a capital crime by all nations, and puniſhed with death.

It is highly neceſſary that a temporal watchman ſhould be a real and hearty friend to the city or army where he is entruſted with that important office; and it is ſtill more highly neceſſary that the ſpiritual watchman be a real and faithful friend to the city and cauſe of Zion.

Every miniſter of the goſpel ought to be a good man. This qualification is indiſpenſable, and woe to them who ruſh into the profeſſion without it: for they will be unfaithful in the duties of their office, and thereby expoſe themſelves to an aggravated condemnation. It is peculiarly incumbent on miniſters to look well to the ſtate of their own ſouls, and to be ſure not to be deſtitute of that real vital piety themſelves, which they are conſtantly endeavouring to convince others is abſolutely neceſſary. An ungodly, or unfaithful miniſter muſt expect a more aggravated condemnation than other ſinners: for he has betrayed his truſt as a watchman, has expoſed the lives of his brethren, and the blood of ſouls will be required of him. As God expreſsly declares in the context. "*When I ſay unto the wicked thou ſhalt ſurely die; and thou giveſt him not warning, nor ſpeakeſt to warn the wicked from his wicked way to ſave his life; the ſame wicked man ſhall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.*"

The chriſtian miniſter is placed here in an honorable office, as a light in the church, to enlighten the path of God's people—as a Steward to feed the family of Christ—and as a watchman to guard them from the wiles of the devil: and if through his neglect they hunger and thirſt are enſnared in the crooked paths of darkneſs, and finally periſh for lack of viſion, their blood will be required at his hand. This is an awful thought, and ſhould lie with weight upon the minds of all thoſe who take upon them the ſacred office of a ſpiritual watchman.

2dly. As the character and office of the chriſtian miniſter are repreſented in our text by the metaphor of a watchman: ſo alſo the duties of that office are alſo illuſtrated by the ſame figure.

Here we obſerve 1ſt, that it is the duty of a watchman or centinel to pay particular attention to the orders which he receives from the commander in chief, and not attempt to alter or mutilate them, or make the leaſt deviation from them on any occaſion. And thus ſaith God to the ſpiritual watchman. *Hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.*

It is the principal duty of the christian minister to preach. Here he is directed how, and what, he ought to preach. *Hear the word at my mouth.* It seems by these expressions that the preachers of that day were inclined to take their theological sentiments from men rather than God, and to teach somethings for doctrine which were not contained in the volume of inspiration.

Happy would it have been for the world if that spirit of pride and idolatry had been confined to the early ages of the church: but like other evil things it has prevailed in every generation: it still prevails, and is a reproach to the ministers of Christ—and the people too.

If one was to take a survey of Christendom at the present day, he would suppose that Christ was divided, and into a great many parts: and that his ministers loved to have it so. Different sects have not only lost, in a great measure, the charitable spirit of the christian, but even the name is gone now. There is scarcely a nominal christian to be found in the land. They are all calvinists and arminians, and hopkintonians, and arians and socinians, and twenty other denominations who have all taken the name, of their respective leaders. It is true that every sect professes to believe the gospel, and every sect is right in their own eyes, and perfectly agreeable to the gospel, and all the rest are wrong. The fact is that they all use the gospel as a kind of common law to support their system at large: but in those points wherein each one differs from all the rest, they have particular statutes of their own.

It has often been remarked "That different sects of christians use the Bible as musicians do an instrument—each one plays a tune upon it to his own taste."

Is it then to be wondered at that religion is in a languishing condition? and that infidelity abounds in the land? If the officers in Christ's kingdom are at variance among themselves, and contending with one another, what greater advantage could the enemy desire? Is not Christ wounded in the house of his friends? Here two questions occur. 1st. What has caused this evil? And 2dly. What will cure it?

Obeying man rather than God has caused the evil; and obeying God rather than man will cure it.

Men of distinguished talents, desirous to distinguish themselves still more, have studied till they have discovered some new thing in the gospel—some new doctrine, or new mode of worship which never was discovered before; and often, it has

been ſomething which never was there. One great man found out that JESUS CHRIST was not a divine perſon, but only the firſt of the angelic order. Another enquired further and diſcovered that he was a meer man. Another has diſcovered that infants are not ſubjects of baptiſm. Another has found out that GOD is the author of ſin, and that unregenerate man ought not to pray. Another has diſcovered that men may be ſaved by their own righteouſneſs. And another has found out that all men will be ſaved. And ſo on,

ALL theſe wonderful diſcoveries have been publiſhed by their authors. And each of theſe leaders has obtained a great company of followers. And what is moſt to be lamented, is that their followers are often more zealous to make converts to their particular leader than to CHRIST: And have the vanity to ſuppoſe that the truth dwells with them alone.

HERE I would make one or two remarks upon this party ſpirit among Chriſtians; and which I wiſh might diſpoſe us all to apply the remedy ſuggeſted in our text.

WHEREVER you find a man who has become a zealous advocate for any one of theſe human ſyſtems, you will find that he is not ſo good a chriſtian as he was before. He has not ſo much charity, nor liberality, nor honeſty, nor any thing that conſtitutes a real chriſtians, as he uſed to have. And in thoſe towns and ſocieties, where any of theſe ſyſtems is moſt zealouſly propagated, there is uſually leſs practical godlineſs than in other places. There is more noiſe and zeal and contention; more of the whirlwind and the fire, but leſs of the ſtill ſmall voice. This I think affords at leaſt a juſtifiable apology for moderation, in all points of controverſy and diſpute on ſpeculative ſentiments in theology.

I PRESUME not to dictate to my Fathers and Brethren, how they ought to preach: but as the young gentleman, who is now to be inducted into the miniſterial office, is a pupil of mine; I ſhall take the liberty to ſuggeſt a few things reſpecting his duty as a preacher of the goſpel.

IT is agreed by all parties, that every chriſtian miniſter ought moſt ſtrictly to obſerve the direction in our text, and take the word from GOD's mouth; i. e. preach no doctrine but what is contained in the ſacred volume. But one great man ſays that ſuch a doctrine is contained in the ſcripture; another ſays it is not. Hence it is clearly the duty of every chriſtian miniſter to lay aſide all theſe great men, and go humbly and prayerfully to the fountain of divine truth and enquire for himſelf, Call no man maſter. Preach the preaching that I bid thee, ſaith GOD to his prophet: and hear the word at my mouth.

WHATEVER a miniſter finds clearly revealed in the word of GOD, it is his duty to preach, whether others believe it or not. But in regard to thoſe doctrines which are founded on human reaſonings, and inductions from the word of GOD, and which are ſo much diſputed at the preſent day, it is the preachers duty to handle them with delicacy and caution, if he handles them at all; and to treat thoſe who differ from him in opinion with tenderneſs and charity.

2dly. THE preacher ſhould be careful never to preſs any doctrine too far; nor attempt to explain thoſe that are inexplicable,* but ſtop where the ſcripture ſtops. Contentions have often ariſen from preſſing doctrines beyond the limits preſcribed in the word of God, and beyond the powers of man to comprehend. I will mention one or two inſtances to illuſtrate my meaning.

1ſt. IN regard to the origin of moral evil. Some great men ſay that GOD was the author of it. This they ſay is evident from the nature of an infinite being; for it could not come into his ſyſtem in any other way but by his efficiency. Now this is going beyond our depth. CHRIST anſwers this enquiry in a different way, and much better adapted to our capacities. He ſays, "*The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man who ſowed good ſeed in his field; but his enemy came and ſowed tares among the wheat.*" This is going as far as we are able to follow. CHRIST does not tell us where the enemy got the ſeed; and it illy becomes us to enquire; and much more to determine.

Again. IN regard to the final condition of the righteous and wicked. Some divines will ſay that the reaſon why one man is ſaved and another loſt, is becauſe the general good requires it. This alſo is going beyond our depth. CHRIST aſſigns a different reaſon, and one much better calculated to make men zealous of good works. He refers the cauſe to every man's own conduct in this life, and extends it no farther. In deſcribing the proceedings of the laſt day, he ſaith to the righteous, *come ye bleſſed of my father inherit the kingdom prepared for you.* And then aſſigns the reaſon why it was prepared them, *For I was an hungred and ye gave me meat*, &c. And to the wicked he ſaith *go ye curſed into everlaſting fire*, and then aſſigns the

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* "*How* Adam's *fault effects all human kind;*
"*How one is three, and three are one combin'd;*
"*How certain preſcience checks not future will;*
"*And why th' almighty goodneſs ſuffers ill;*
"*Such thoughts as theſe are far too deep for man,*
"*Were never well explain'd nor never can.*

reaſon of their condemnation. *For I was an hungred and ye gave me no meat*, &c. This is the only reaſon which CHRIST aſſigns, and it appears to be ſufficient.

THE chriſtian miniſter ought ever to pay a ſacred and reverential regard to divine truth; habitually conſider it as the word of God, a ſacred and holy thing, which muſt not be conformed to any human ſyſtems, nor diverted from its natural meaning to ſupport them; but like the pillar of fire in the wilderneſs, it muſt be his only guide and director. This word and only this he muſt faithfully declare unto his people; for if any man ſhall add unto theſe things, GOD ſhall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man ſhall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, GOD ſhall take away his part out of the book of life.

3dly. ANOTHER duty incumbent on the the ſpiritual watchman is vigilance.—The temporal watchman who ſleeps on his poſt is puniſhed with death. Drowſineſs, and inattention to duty in the miniſters of CHRIST, are crimes of a ſcarlet colour and crimſon die; and will ſurely incur an aggravated condemnation. If inattention to the orders of man incurs the puniſhment of temporal deſtruction; of how much ſorer puniſhment ſhall he be thought worthy, who diſregards the ſpecial injunctions of the moſt high GOD, ſleeps on the walls of Zion and betrays the ſouls of his brethren to eternal ruin.

VIGILANCE in a miniſter of CHRIST, implies a conſtant, zealous and faithful attention to the duties of his office. The temporal watchman is not allowed to intermeddle with any other buſineſs.—He is ſuppported and paid by the people who employ him. And as CHRIST has ordained that his miniſters ſhall receive an honourable ſupport from the people to whom they miniſter,* and has forbid them to miniſter on any other conditions, it is incumbent on them to devote their whole time and talents to the duties of their office, according to the Apoſtle's direction. Give thyſelf wholly to theſe things that thy profiting may appear to all.

Once more. ANOTHER duty incumbent on the miniſters of CHRIST is to abide in their calling and continue faithful unto the death. It is a capital crime in a temporal watchman to quit his poſt before he is relieved. What reaſons will juſtify a ſpiritual watchman in quitting his, I ſhall not pretend to determine. But would obſerve, that as the office is of a ſacred and important nature, and of divine appointment, no temporal conſiderations of wealth or worldly honor can ever be con-

* *Mat.* 10*th.* 14.

ſidered a ſufficient reaſon for quitting the profeſſion. St. Paul directs Timothy not to quit his poſt; but to continue faithful in the work; and as a motive to perſeverance, he tells him that he would ſave his own ſoul, and the ſouls of others. *"Take heed to thyſelf, and to thy doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou ſhalt both ſave thyſelf, and them that hear thee."*— And as a further encouragement to perſeverance in the work, I would recommend to all my brethren, often to conſider the gracious words of our divine LORD. *Lo I am with you alway.* This is a precious promiſe; and if properly realized it will inſpire us with an holy reſolution to encounter every difficulty and danger that may lie in our way: It will fix us on a firm foundation, which cannot be ſhaken by any temporal conſiderations whatever. It will inſpire us with ſuch feelings as the Apoſtle experienced in view of bonds and impriſonments.— *None of theſe things move me, neither count I my life dear to myſelf ſo that I might finiſh my courſe with joy, and the miniſtry which I have received of the Lord Jeſus.*

THUS by the metaphor of a watchman I have ſuggeſted ſome of the duties incumbent on the chriſtian miniſter. From the nature and duties of this office it is very obvious that there are ſome reciprocal duties incumbent on the people among whom he labours in word and doctrine. But time will not allow me to go into a particular deſcription of theſe: and as I hope there is no ſpecial occaſion for it in this place, ſhall therefore only obſerve in few words. 1ſt. That it is the duty of a people to receive and honor a faithful miniſter as the meſſenger of GOD ſet over them in the LORD. 2dly. It is their duty to attend with ſeriouſneſs, conſtancy, and candor, on all his goſpel adminiſtrations; ſo that their ſouls may be in health and proſper. 3dly. To treat his perſon and character with friendſhip, reſpect and tenderneſs; ſo that peace and mutual love may be preſerved. And 4th. It is their duty to provide a comfortable ſupport for him: ſo that he may give himſelf wholly to the duties of his office, and his profiting appear unto all.

I SHALL now apply the ſubject in ſuch addreſſes as are common on theſe occaſions.

And 1ſt. THE preceding remarks may be applied to all the miniſters of CHRIST, and ſhould excite them to diligence and activity in the ſervice of their LORD and maſter.

WE my fathers and brethren, have been called in providence to be watchmen in the city of our GOD: to guard our fellow-citizens from the ſnares and temptations of the devil; and proclaim unto them the glad tidings of pardon and peace thro'

the atonement of a crucified mediator. May we ever entertain juſt apprehenſions of the important duties of our ſtation, and the infinite obligations we are under to be diligent, faithful and perſevering in the diſcharge of them. We are officers in the church of CHRIST, and there is an important charge committed to our truſt. And at the preſent day there ſeems to be a particular call in providence for uncommon diligence, activity, and union among ourſelves. The enemies of Zion are multiplied: they have formed a conſpiracy againſt the city of our GOD, and are leagued in battle array againſt us. We have now neither time nor ſtrength to ſpare, to combat one another, or to ſettle trifling diſputes and matters of opinion among ourſelves. The common cauſe requires us to act in concert. Let us then like faithful watchmen, ceaſe to inſiſt upon thoſe unimportant things which give offence to our brethren, and cauſe diviſion among us; and let us all dwell upon the clearly revealed doctrines, and plain practical precepts of GODS word. And thus united we ſhould be to our enemies, like the ſword of the LORD and of Gideon.

Further. LET us remember that our time of ſervice is ſhort, our work great and momentous, and that we ought therefore to ſpare no pains in oppoſing the enemies, and building up the cauſe of Zion. Let us be much in prayer to GOD for aſſiſtance and direction. And to animate us in our duty let us often anticipate the ſolemnities of that glorious day, when the ſecrets of men's hearts will be revealed and judged by JESUS CHRIST. And when they who have turned many to righteouſneſs will ſhine as the brightneſs of the firmament, and as the ſtars forever and ever.

2d. THE ſubject may be particularly applied to the Paſtor elect.

DEAR SIR, You are now to be placed as a watchman on the walls of Zion, and to take the particular charge and overſight of this church and people. Your duty in this important ſtation has been imperfectly ſuggeſted in the preceding diſcourſe. Your employment, if you are faithful, will be delightful and honourable. It will alſo be difficult. The chriſtian life, eſpecially in the miniſterial department, is in many reſpects a warfare. You are now to act as a watchman in two capacities: You are to guard the city of our GOD; and what is more difficult ſtill you are to guard your own heart. And let me tell you that your fidelity and uſefulneſs in your public character will very much depend upon your faithfulneſs to yourſelf, in watching over the habitual exerciſes and deſires of your own ſoul.

THEREFORE take heed unto thyſelf, labour to impreſs your mind with a realizing feeling ſenſe of thoſe infinitely important truths which you deliver to your people.

WE truſt that you are ſavingly acquainted with JESUS CHRIST and him crucified, and that you are ready to ſpend and be ſpent in his ſervice. But it is a good caution of the Apoſtle that "If any man think he is CHRIST, let him of himſelf think this again. See to it my brother that your heart is right with GOD, and that you are a real friend to the cauſe of CHRIST. This is the firſt and principal accompliſhment of a goſpel miniſter. This will make you love your work, and like the riſing ſun, will illuminate the path of your duty.

IN regard to your external deportment,—let your converſation and behaviour always be in ſtrict conformity to the goſpel of CHRIST; ſerious and ſocial, equally diſtant from trifling gaiety, and an hypocritical hanging of the head. The ſucceſs of your miniſtry under GOD will very much depend on your conduct and example. Good examples perſuade much more powerfully than precepts; like the magnet they will have an attractive and commanding influence on all that behold them. Although the efficacy of divine ordinances may not depend on the ſanctity of him who adminiſters them; yet conſpicuous piety and goodneſs, will give weight to your counſels, edge to your reproofs, and force to your exhortations. Reſt not in your preſent attainments. The good man is ever preſſing forward. Fix your eye on the great example held up in the goſpel, and labour for a nearer conformity till you arrive to the fullneſs of the meaſure of a perfect man in CHRIST.

AS the church and people of this town have placed their affection on you, and called you to the paſtoral office, ſee that you do not abuſe their confidence—Kind offices a kind requital claim—ever entertain a ſincere affection for the people of your charge. Be much in prayer to GOD, for yourſelf and for them, and for his bleſſing on your labours among them. Your comfort and uſefulneſs, as a miniſter, will greatly depend on your ſecret, frequent and fervent addreſſes at the throne of grace. Prayer is the channel through which the bleſſings of heaven deſcend upon man. *Aſk and you ſhall receive.* And *I will be enquired of,* ſaith GOD, *to do it for them.*

FEAR not any difficulties that may lie in your way: doubtleſs there will be many. Gird on the whole armour of GOD as a good ſoldier of JESUS CHRIST.—Set your face as a flint. Paſs through evil report and good report. Let none of theſe things move you. Be faithful as a

watchman for GOD ; and be zealous for the precious and immortal ſouls of your people. Let not the want of ſucceſs diſcourage you ; but remember this, that if you are faithful, tho' Iſrael be not gathered you will be glorious. May your bow abide in ſtrength, and the arms of your hands be made ſtrong by the hands of the mighty GOD of Jacob.

MY brethren and friends of this church and congregation. We rejoice with you in the ſolemnities of this day and the pleaſing proſpects which are opening before you. We thank GOD on your behalf, that you have not been ſuffered long to continue as ſheep without a ſhepherd. Behold the watchman whom you have choſen. He now conſecrates himſelf to your ſervice in JESUS CHRIST, and comes to do the will of GOD among you—to ſpend his time and ſtrength in the ſervice of your ſouls. Receive him as a precious gift of our aſcended LORD. Treat him kindly and reverence him as a meſſenger ſent from GOD. Eſteem him in love for his works ſake. Pray for him, and ſubmit yourſelves to him in the Lord, as having the rule over you, and watching for your ſouls as one that muſt give an account. Pray, daily in your families, for your miniſter, for one another, and for a bleſſing on his labours among you. Remember that his uſefulneſs depends much upon you, upon your peaceable, candid and conſtant attendance on his miniſtrations. Take heed that no root of bitterneſs is found among you, to deſtroy the preſent pleaſing proſpect. Labour to live in love and peace ; and may the GOD of peace and love be with you and bleſs you, and finally give you an inheritance among them that are ſanctified.

MY beloved friends of every claſs and deſcription, ſuffer the word of exhortation, and be perſuaded to act up to the dignity of your character as candidates for a glorious immortality. The trifling concerns of this world will ſoon be to us as tho' they were not. In a few days more, our probationary ſeaſon will end and our condition be fixed forever. May this important thought lie with ſuitable weight upon our hearts, and have a commanding influence upon us in every future day of our life.

WE live in a day of great events, and of great light—proportionable improvements, in virtue and piety, will be expected of us. The preſent diſpenſations of providence exhibit ſome pleaſing intimations that the grand drama of this world is drawing to a cloſe—Moſt of the things foretold in the book of GOD are already fulfilled : and the remainder appear to be haſtening to their accompliſhment—Awake to righteouſneſs and ſin not—The day of our redemption is drawing nigh—Bleſſed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments clean.

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